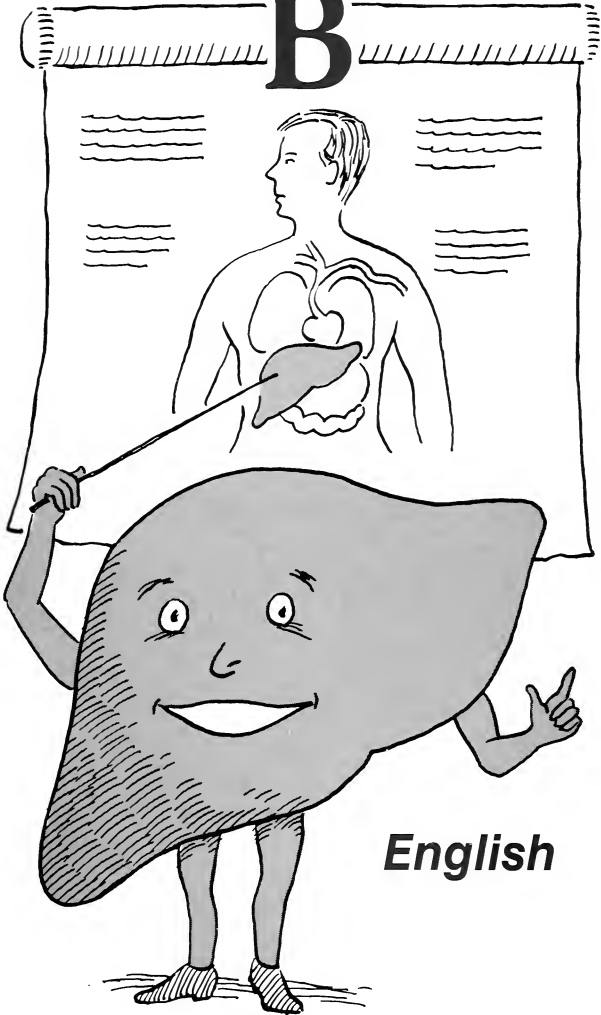


# HEPATITIS

# B



***English***



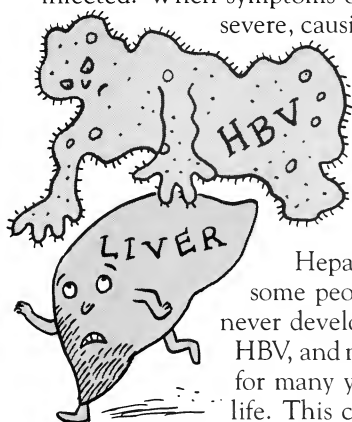
**AAPCHO**

*Association of Asian Pacific  
Community Health Organizations*

## What is Hepatitis B?

**H**epatitis B is a serious infection of the liver, caused by a virus called the Hepatitis B Virus (HBV).

When people are infected with HBV, the liver is inflamed. Symptoms of liver disease can occur, but many individuals never realize they have been infected. When symptoms occur, they can be severe, causing disabling illness.



Most people recover from Hepatitis B within several weeks, and develop antibodies (protectants) from HBV. This is an acute case of

Hepatitis B. However, some people (about 5-10%) never develop antibodies to HBV, and may harbor the virus for many years or their entire life. This condition is called Chronic Hepatitis B. This is especially common among infants and children.

People with chronic Hepatitis B may have very few symptoms, and may not even be aware that they still have the virus. Others have ongoing liver problems resulting in persistent hepatitis, liver failure (Cirrhosis) or liver cancer. In either case, a chronic carrier may infect others, and pass the virus to others, who may also develop hepatitis.

## Who is at Risk?

Anyone can get Hepatitis B, however, certain populations have especially high rates of infection. These include:

- Asians and Pacific Islanders
- Haitians
- Sub-Saharan Africans
- Alaskan Eskimos
- Health Care Workers
- Intravenous Drug Users
- Persons with multiple sex partners who do not practice safe sex



- Institutionalized populations, such as residents in facilities serving the mentally retarded

## How is Hepatitis B Spread?

Hepatitis B can be spread unknowingly in different ways.

### 1 Contact with Infected Blood and Blood Products

Hepatitis B virus can be passed through blood transfusions when the blood has not been screened for HBV. In the United States all blood donors are now screened for HBV. Note: You CANNOT get infected with HBV by donating blood. HBV can also be spread by contaminated needles and syringes (sharing dirty needles) or razors, or exposure to other objects which may contain small traces of human blood.

### 2 Contact with Infected Body Fluids

HBV may be found in body fluids such as urine, semen, tears, saliva, breast milk, and rarely in feces. It can be transmitted by close intimate contact including sexual intercourse.

### 3 Infection During Childbirth

Pregnant women infected with HBV can pass the virus to their babies, usually during the birth process. This is how the disease is most commonly spread in the Far East and developing countries.

### 4 Household Contacts

Contact with infected household members may spread the Hepatitis B virus, but the exact mode of transmission in this instance is not clear.



## How is Hepatitis B Diagnosed?

Because so many patients with HBV are symptom free, the only sure way to diagnose Hepatitis B is by testing blood for HBV. Health care providers can select the appropriate tests, and make the diagnosis of Hepatitis B.

## What are the Signs of Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B infection can be very mild, often resembling a mild case of flu. Some people (especially children) may have no symptoms at all.

Other people may have severe symptoms, which

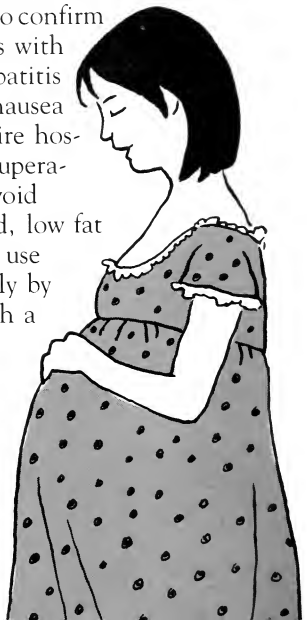
include nausea and/or vomiting, fever, fatigue, abdominal pain, muscle aches, and diarrhea. Their skin and eyeballs may turn yellow and their urine deep orange. People can have some, all, or none of these symptoms.



## What Should I do if I Have Hepatitis B?

People who suspect they may have been infected by Hepatitis B, should see their health provider.

Blood tests are required to confirm HBV infection. Patients with severe symptoms of Hepatitis B including persistent nausea and vomiting may require hospitalization. During recuperation, patients should avoid exertion, eat a balanced, low fat diet, avoid alcohol and use medications advised only by a doctor. Follow-up with a health provider is essential. Although patients may fully recover from symptoms of acute hepatitis, they may not have developed immunity, and may still



be infectious. They may be at risk for developing liver disease in the future and should seek regular medical attention.

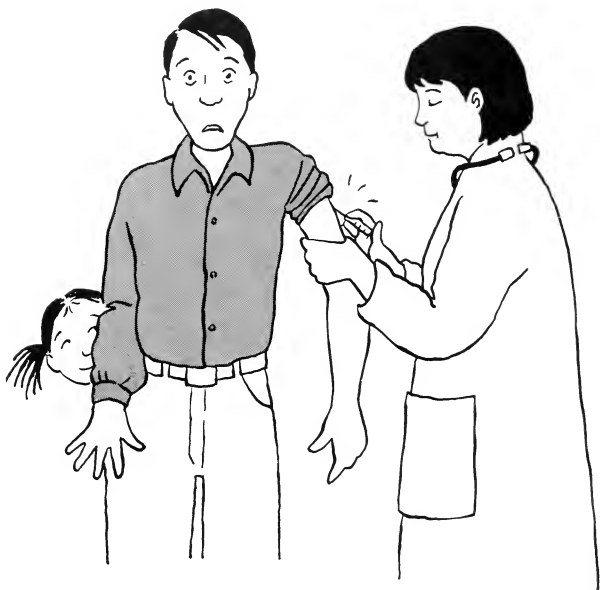
## **Who Should be Screened for Hepatitis B?**

Every pregnant woman of Asian/Pacific descent should be tested for HBV although they may have no memory of previous liver disease. If undetected, their children are at great risk for developing hepatitis. Only vaccination at birth can prevent this tragedy from occurring. The vaccine is given at birth, and two additional shots are given at 1 and 6 months of age. It is safe and highly effective. Anyone who believes he/she has been exposed to HBV or has symptoms that may be Hepatitis B should be screened. Some doctors recommend that all individuals of Asian/Pacific descent should be screened since it is possible for the virus to be passed without having any noticeable symptoms.

## **How to Avoid The Spread of HBV**

People *who have Hepatitis B* or who carry HBV should follow these guidelines to prevent the spread of HBV:

- Avoid sharing personal items that may have traces of blood or body secretions e.g. razors, toothbrushes, eating utensils, hypodermic needles



- Never donate blood
- Cover cuts or open sores
- Wash with soap and water after each bathroom use
- Have your children, spouse and/or sex partners screened for HBV
- Use of condoms can help in preventing the passage of HBV during intercourse

## **Prevention through Vaccination**

People who have never had Hepatitis B can be vaccinated to protect themselves from the virus. This highly effective vaccine is especially recommended for household members of a person with chronic hepatitis, and newborn children of mothers with HBV who can pass the virus to their children during childbirth.

This brochure is available in English, Chinese, Korean, Laotian, Samoan, Tagalog and Vietnamese.

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